

OXFORD

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The Proctors have been part of our institutional structure since the fourteenth century. They are unique to Oxford. No other UK university has positions quite like this: even in Cambridge their role is significantly different, although in both cases they carry out a variety of comparable and essential student-centred disciplinary functions. But the annual Oration by our demitting Proctors and Assessor is unique.

Apart from their everyday responsibilities for student welfare and conduct Oxford's Proctors and Assessor (and their deputies) play a symbolic role of great importance. They attend all central committee meetings. They therefore act as representatives of the academic community within the entire range of administrative processes undergirding the workings of the University, processes largely invisible to the rest of us. Cumulatively those who have served as Proctors acquire an unparalleled understanding of how the University operates and their experience then feeds back at college (and sometimes longer-term central committee) levels.

In their demitting Oration the Proctors and Assessor perform what could be argued to be, ultimately, their most important function. Here they report on their concluding observations concerning the state of the University: from the perspectives of academics they give us all a chance to look behind the scenes. The most recent Oration (*Gazette*, 24th March 2022, Supplement (2) to No 5344, Vol 152) fully lives up to the tradition. The Assessor gets straight to the point:

"Welly Square over there' and 'academic departments over here', two cities at first glance, characterised by different languages, different ways of working and different ways of seeing the world. But,....there is 'cross-hatching' or 'seeing across.....'."

In the absence of Congregation

The Senior Proctor highlights problems of diversity of representation on University committees:

"One challenge ...is that University structures and nomination for committees can be complicated (even eligibility to be a Congregation member is a bit opaque and I was surprised by the number of University roles for which membership of Congregation is a requirement)".

She goes on to identify specific new trends:

"As well as low student confidence, open-book exams have led to some drop in the confidence academic staff and examiners have in assessment processes, with concern about student plagiarism and collusion".

"Regarding non-academic conduct, the Proctors have seen, and have heard from college deans, that students have lost some of their usual ways of living courteously and supportively together, both in person and online".

The Junior Proctor reports that:

"our undergraduate numbers have grown by 4.6% to over 12,500, and postgraduate numbers have increased by a rate of 8.6% to just over 13,000 between 2019/20 and 2020/1".

"What we learn [from a recent staff survey]is that our people work hard, and there is perhaps some expectation that their efforts are acknowledged, if not better rewarded".

"Two townhall meetings [on the review of the EJRA] were held this year and it is clear that there are strong feelings about whether the EJRA serves the University's aims. ...the EJRA review committee has mined unique data, that if followed will hopefully lead us some way to reducing the tension".

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...and much more

“There have this year been many debates about the legitimacy of certain forms of language, on questions of sexual orientation and gender, on sexual violence, and on the freedom of academics to teach and debate hard questions on religion and nationalism amidst concerns about their personal safety. Expectations about what the University can or should do are high, if divergent, and we have seen the potential for these very difficult questions to test our collegiality”.

According to the conventions of such Orations the Proctors and Assessor are discrete. One often needs to read between the lines. The Orations are, in effect, carefully framed, and necessarily succinct, critical reviews of the inner workings of the University. At a time when Congregation appears to be moribund what other route do we have left to discover the thinking of those in power who determine University policy?

B.B., T.J.H

How to initiate Congregation actions

How to trigger a debate or discussion in Congregation

It is open to any 20 or more members of Congregation to propose a resolution or topic for discussion at a meeting of Congregation; requests must be made in writing to the Registrar not later than noon on the 22nd day before the relevant meeting. Any 2 or more members of Congregation can submit an amendment to, or announce an intention to vote against, a resolution or a legislative proposal (*i.e.* a proposal to amend the statutes). Notice must be given to the Registrar (in writing) not later than noon on the 8th day before the meeting.

Questions and replies

Any 2 or more members of Congregation may ask a question in Congregation about any matter concerning the policy or the administration of the University. Requests must be submitted to the Registrar (in writing) not later than noon on the 18th day before the Congregation meeting at which it is to be asked. The question and the reply (drafted by Council) will be published in *Gazette* in the week prior to the relevant meeting. The answer is also formally read out at the meeting. Supplementary questions are allowed.

Postal votes

Attendance at meetings of Congregation tends to be low. Postal voting can potentially allow opinion to be easily accessed more widely across Congregation membership. Congregation can trigger a postal vote after a debate (but not after a discussion or a question and reply where no vote is taken). 25 or more members of Congregation have to be present (“on the floor”) at the relevant debate. The request must be made by 4pm on the 6th day after the debate, signed by 50 members of Congregation, in writing to the Registrar. Council can also decide to hold a postal ballot, by the same deadline.

Flysheets

To generate a flysheet for publication with the *Gazette*, the camera-ready copy (2 sides maximum) should be submitted with at least 10 signatures on an indemnity form (obtainable from the Registrar) by 10am on the Monday in the week in which publication is desired.

Regulations governing the conduct of business in Congregation can be found at: <http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/statutes/regulations/529-122.shtml>

Items placed on the agenda for Congregation are published in the *Gazette*.

The Congregation website is at: www.admin.ox.ac.uk/councilsec/governance/congregation.

Advice on Congregation procedures is available from the Council Secretariat on request (email: congregation.meeting@admin.ox.ac.uk).

Christ Church: College and Cathedral

CHRISTOPHER LEWIS

In the last issue of the *Oxford Magazine*, Brian Martin provided us with a recipe for Christ Church's future, namely for a separation of the life and management of the Cathedral from that of the College. As a part of his article, he makes a number of important points about Colleges and their Heads. He falls, however, at the final fence!

One issue which he helpfully raises is the role of a Head of House in an Oxford or Cambridge College. There have been testing times both in Cambridge and in Oxford, leading to a number of departures. The Cambridge experiences at, for example King's or Corpus Christi (of which I happen to be an alumnus) are lessons for all. Brian is absolutely right in saying that the Head of House is in no way a Chief Executive, but instead is a *primus inter pares* who has to work with a Governing Body, where the collective power appropriately lies. The constitution should say that if a Head of House loses the trust and respect (otherwise known as confidence) of the Governing Body, he or she must go. That would be brought about by a majority vote after a stated meeting. It is possible that a number of Colleges should have 'governance reviews' in order to check their constitutions.

On powers, I remember the Master of Trinity, Cambridge making a somewhat male joke about his role, namely the power to exercise his authority at dinner on a hot night by saying that men could take off their jackets.... but only when they had already begun to do so! If a Head of House has bright ideas concerning policy and practice, the best route is indirect, for example via a sub-committee of Governing Body, so that the idea can be chewed over and possibly blocked at an early stage. If a radical idea emerges as that of a committee, albeit backed by the Head of House, it may have an easier passage.

There are, however, a number of other tests of a Head of House. The first is that it is a full-time job and not, for example, a mere reward for an honourable career. Then there are questions. What is his or her way of participating in what is basically a federal organization, namely the wider University? What of speaking at events and entertaining guests of the College? Then there is the crucial role of relationships with alumni and the need to visit them far and wide, keeping them up to date with the life of the College for which many have a profound affection. Fund-raising is usually but a by-product of the relations of the College to its members. It is important to add many other tasks: ensuring that safeguarding and harassment policies are up to date; keeping up with the concerns not just of the academic members and of the undergraduate and graduate students, but also of the many staff who work in a wide variety of jobs in a College. Wandering around quads or gardens and chatting to people is an important role. One of the wonders of a College is the number of people who are enormously loyal to the place.

Most of the above is essential to the character of an Oxford or Cambridge College, but after his insights into

the role of a Head of House, there is then a wholly unwarranted jump in Brian Martin's article: the assumption that if this and that describes the role of a Head of House, then it follows that the arrangement at Christ Church should cease and there should be a different person as the head of each of the two aspects of the place: College and Cathedral. The *non sequitur* is plain as he moves from excellent points about Masters and the like to the position of Dean.

In 1546, a few months before his death, Henry VIII decided that he would take over what Cardinal Wolsey had begun two decades earlier, and create an institution which contained both a Cathedral for the new diocese of Oxford and a College of the University. Henry endowed this institution 'generously' (if such a term is fair, given the Dissolution of the Monasteries) and decided that it would be presided over by a Dean and Canons. There followed thirty-three Deans up to the time of Henry Liddell in the second half of the 19th century. The succession was largely a success, although there were some changes during the Commonwealth which led to a Dean being deposed in 1651 and then returning at the Restoration. There was also a little local difficulty at the beginning of the 19th century when two Deans 'moved on' in 1824 and 1831, the first with enormous debts and the second having spent too much time gambling on the race course.

During Henry Liddell's time, in 1867, there was an important reform, the confirmation of which required an Act of Parliament. New statutes were drawn up whereby Christ Church ceased to be presided over by the Dean and Canons alone and became similar to other Colleges; there was a Governing Body consisting of the Academics (who decided to continue calling themselves Students to demonstrate pride in their history) and the Canons, the whole being chaired by the Dean. That arrangement had no deleterious consequences and has continued. Today, there are fifty-seven Students and six Canons. Of the Canons, four have academic posts in the University and one is the Sub-Dean, who takes day-to-day responsibility for the Cathedral. The Sub-Dean's role is performed in consultation with the Dean, the Canons and the College Chaplain; together they all have responsibility for what goes on in the Cathedral.

This history speaks for itself. Christ Church is one institution as founded by Henry, sinner though he was, and with the Monarch as Visitor of the whole 'in a personal capacity', playing a part in appointments via a Patronage Secretary. The royal involvement has been much appreciated in what has, on the whole, been a flourishing history, and it has legal and financial implications. There have never been different 'parts' which could then be 'unscrambled'. There is one site, one history, one endowment. The Cathedral is what is called 'a peculiar' which means that it is tied to the College and separated from the diocesan system of supervision, although in fact Diocese and Cathedral have worked perfectly well together. The

only disadvantage of this Cathedral is that it is somewhat hidden away. The Cathedral has to make efforts to be accessible to the people of the Diocese and it does.

Any attempt to separate the two aspects of the institution would almost certainly fail on legal grounds, on some kind of dispute over endowment. That, however, is not at all the main issue. Cathedral and College have always been and still are in a symbiotic relationship, albeit in a constantly changing society.

Gort na gCapall

for Richard Holloway

But if not ... Daniel iii:18

After centuries' waste, some still tread, it seems, between rectangles of waving grass this path to a place of emptiness where recalled hands were once upraised: to a silence that might enshrine memory of a word;

Here, the whole land an open book of invasions, here ivy has clawed masonry to rubble: four low walls frame eddies stirred in sighing grass, where, if a man knelt half hoping for reconciliation with absence, there might still be only the wind rippling tall grass beneath the sky.

Say perhaps that is all there ever was – but, suppose absence left an imprint, matrix of fossil signs long gone, on interlace of sun and wind, on confluence of space and time, might not nullity become presence in some ghostly Mass under these clouds with a whole infinity beyond?

And even if not, might consonance of sun and space, of wind and time, still vivify for one, pilgrim despite himself, reconciled to absence, this sea of grass: as if to live as if were the point after all?

Gort na gCapall: a townland in West Clare

NICOLAS JACOBS

Nicolas Jacobs, by origin a Wessex man, born in the New Forest, but now living in North Wales, is a dedicated though not always a very effective gardener. Educated at Christ Church and having for many years taught mediaeval English at Jesus, he has, beside academic publications in English, French and Welsh, published poetry in a number of small magazines over the past fifty years. These include *New Measure*, *Delta*, *English*, *Swansea Review*, *Agenda*, *London Magazine*, *Oxford Magazine*, *Archipelago* and, most recently, *PN Review*, *Poetry Salzburg Review* and *Raceme*.

Placeless

Compel me from my home. Quietly, without destroying it or killing my neighbours. That alone wounds what I am, like tearing the shell off a crab, the peel from fruit as yet unharvested. Where I happen to live is not the point, whether Oxford, Fallujah, or Sioux Falls, South Dakota. A willing, planned removal is nothing like this; eviction by force is a maiming, as we know from our own familiar victims. But these are double mutilations. Loss of place, but also the place removed, no longer there to filigree its people, melted down behind the thousands now cast out, wandering guests, some of whom may never again invite.

RIP BULKELEY

Rip Bulkeley is an Academic Visitor at Exeter College. He recently edited *Rebel Talk*, an anthology of poems from the climate emergency which is published by Extinction Rebellion Oxford.

Not
the
Gazette

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Donnish Dominion to Student Consumerism in one (very long) Academic Career

DAVID PALFREYMAN

The media has during late-March made much of a UCU survey that seemingly showed well over half of university staff were seriously thinking of quitting within five years, supposedly demoralised by the allegedly toxic working culture of the modern university. Presumably academics themselves are within this number, and yet some will have vague memories of the Halcyon Days of ‘donnish dominion’ (Halsey, 1992, *Decline of Donnish Dominion*) – UK Halcyon Days that faded or declined from the mid-70s (in 1976 when I first entered university administration an early task at the University of Liverpool was to organise a 5% cut in the generous funding of the Latin American Studies department; by 1981 it was 15% across the board at my then employer, Warwick – and 45% at places such as Aston, Bradford, and Salford). Jencks & Riesman, *The Academic Revolution* (1968), had chronicled the similar victory of faculty by the mid-60s as they vanquished the lay control of boards of trustees and also the over-weening authority of ‘The Administration’ in US universities.

One suspects it is against that folk-memory awareness of what were once decidedly better times that so many now see a career in higher education as not what it once was. By 1980 David Riesman (the eminent American sociologist, Chicago and then Harvard) was charting the demise of that faculty dominance in US HE and the rise of student consumerism – *On Higher Education: The Academic Enterprise in an Era of Rising Student Consumerism*. Over here such student consumerism has only emerged more recently, but is combined (as in the US) with a clear shift of power from academics to the full-time managers – as well as very recently combined with the re-emergence of lay control as the lay-dominated Council makes it once again clear where absolute authority formally and constitutionally lies, as it always has (not at all with the Senate even in terms of what was formerly thought of by the 1960s as a bi-cameral system).

Except, of course, in Oxford and Cambridge where the academic inmates remained (and remain, just about) firmly in charge of the university (and even more so of the college) asylum. When the English (or rather the Oxbridge model) for the university/college crossed the Atlantic that did not involve the Americans copying the concept of faculty sovereignty (nor of legally independent colleges within a confederal university structure) – Harvard, Princeton, Yale, and the early State public universities such as Georgia were from day one going to be controlled by their lay trustees. And when the civic university model duly crossed back to England in the 1900s that concept of formal lay dominance came with it – in the early days

of the University of Birmingham the professors as mere hired-help in gowns were refused use of the grand Council Chamber for meetings of the Senate! Yet, if the University of Oxford and the University of Cambridge have kept lay bods firmly in their minority place and if the colleges have not even let them onto their GBs, still here donnish dominion within ‘the collegiate university’ has been threatened by creeping bureaucratic centralisation and by administrative bloat (and a tad by a few Heads of House who are confused and think they are CEOs rather than Chairs of the Board) – albeit not hitherto challenged much by student consumerism.

So, by the 2010s, however, elsewhere across the English HE landscape the perfect storm was brewing – the fee-paying students were developing a consumerist mentality; the lay members were flexing their constitutional muscles; and there was administrative bloat as well as a power-grab by CEO-minded V-Cs aided and abetted by COO-badged Registrars. At least as perceived by hapless academics bitter about years of below-inflation pay awards, about overwork as student numbers increase, about the use of casual/adjunct staff, about reduced pension benefits, about overpaid V-Cs, about remote and incompetent managers, about the withering of collegiality (or shared-governance as it is termed in the USA), about de-professionalisation. And add into this mix enhanced demands from Government for accountability and for value-for-money, and the consequential passing in 2017 of the Higher Education and Research Act that set up the Office for Students as a regulator of English universities and promoter of the student interest above that of benignly minding (and directly funding) the universities as was the remit of HEFCE and even more so of the UGC before HEFCE. Then for good measure chuck in the 2015 Consumer Rights Act, as a result of which the OfS consumer protection law the OfS as a ‘Condition’ of registration requires a university to apply – and, lo, we have the sort of ‘student consumerism’ Riesman identified within US HE some forty years ago.

Let’s look, therefore, more closely at the Riesman 1980 analysis and thesis, and ask whether English academe faces the same trajectory he predicted for American HE. In fact, he had called for better protection of the student interest in an earlier 1956 work, *Constraint and Variety in American Education*, noting the deep information asymmetry problem that the OfS still wrestles with today in terms of students truly knowing just what they are buying:

'the cause of improved education would be enormously aided if some impartial yet fearless agency could issue vivid and candid reports on colleges and schools [arguably, now achieved here by OFSTED re the latter but nowhere near by the QAA re the former]... [thus the need for an agency that] polices school and college catalogues and brochures and does research on the qualitative aspects of education from the student's point of view... a respected clearinghouse for penetrating reports on colleges could be created... [although nobody] should underestimate the resistance colleges would put up to this kind of investigation...'

(indeed when a precursor of the QAA began to get too close to the seminar room via a more intrusive inspection regime it was quickly shut down by the HE industry that, bizarrely, had been allowed to own and control the quality policing system and hence mark its own homework!).

So, by 1980 Riesman focussed on the decline of faculty influence and the rise of student consumerism, but a consumerism that perversely led to students being offered only a mediocre education because the student was too passive a consumer and confused 'wants' with 'needs' while being hampered by 'the haphazard and ill-informed ways in which students choose colleges'. How then to get the students to become 'active producers of their own education'? – while ensuring they do not become victims of institutions where 'unscrupulous' faculty dominance or bureaucratic control means 'advantage can still be taken of them'. Thus, his final chapter 'probes the potential for effective federal consumer protection of students and for assistance in improving student choice' – and preferably 'without deleterious regulation of institutions'. Which is precisely the challenge set by HERA17 for the OfS some 40 years on.

Riesman's Chapter 1 of this 1980 text is titled 'The Era of Faculty Dominance and its Decline', noting how not long before (the 1960s and on into the early-70s) 'the faculties of the major public and private universities and of the top-flight private liberal arts colleges had triumphed over most sources of outside interference' (including 'trustee control' and control by 'federal agencies'). But by Chapter 4 we reach the era of 'College Marketing and Student Consumers' – which can be detrimental to all concerned (except power-hungry managers): a reduction in faculty hegemony and a sort of con-trick for the student punters ('Even the most shoddy, cut-rate, and cutthroat degrees are not necessarily frauds on the student consumer. They may, in fact, be examples of collusion between the academic vendor and the student buyer to secure a credential at some monetary cost but almost no cost in time or effort' (thus, while surveys over recent years show UK students spending ever less time in the lecture/seminar room as well as on 'reading', the degree grade inflation has all but eliminated the 2.2 and the 3rd...)).

And, as Riesman later notes, there is the risk of some entering HE who would have been better not to bother – 'Among the decisions for which students need counsel is, of course, whether to go to college at all.' (citing Richard Freeman's *The Overeducated American*, 1976). Current emerging (and very welcome) Government policy for England is, of course, a belated attempt to address the over-hyping of 'Going to Uni' as higher education that has over-expanded at the expense of other forms of post-18 tertiary education and notably the hitherto Cinderella area of vocational further education.

By Chapter 11 we encounter 'Government Intervention for Consumer Protection' as necessary 'to protect

students, viewed in their role as consumers, from educational fraud and deception' – although some caveats are needed when throwing around terms such as 'fraud' and 'consumers': first, concerning grade-inflation and, second, on the student as a co-producer:

'Where individual faculty members, desperate for students, compete for them by an automatic grade of A and by demanding minimal hours of work, this unprofessional (though understandable) strategy can scarcely be called fraudulent, since the students are eager rather than deceived consumers.'

And:

'Once we leave the arena of collusion between the purchaser and vendor of educational credentials and start thinking of students as consumers buying educational services, we realise that the picture of them as simply or merely consumers is a distortion. Students are at once the producers and consumers of their own educational development; one of the major aims of the development is to help them become more active producers, less passive and simply receptive consumers.'

All in all, while 'in the present situation of serious concern with marketing on the part of colleges to recruit students, the hope for countering salesmanship by disinterested advice may appear quixotic', it is vital to do so since 'college is the most important "purchase" a young person is likely to make – a purchase that is always costly in terms of income foregone and in time and effort'. As already stated, some 40 years on, the regulation of English HE now begins to grapple with this very same issue (still substantially unresolved in American HE) of 'Government Intervention for [Student] Consumer Protection' and we can but hope the OfS, combined with recent activity on the part of the CMA and the ASA in relation to HE, as well as the development of the TEF and the latest initiatives to rebalance HE & FE so as to create coherent TE, might make some progress to the benefit of that 'young person' making that 'costly' personal investment.

David Palfreyman is a Member of the OfS Board but here writes in a purely personal capacity. His proposed solution to the consumer protection of the student is a clear, fair, comprehensive, standardised U-C Business2Consumer contract with easily enforced 'material information' terms that address the information asymmetry problem – as set out in the 2016 Paper No60 at the OxCHEPS website... oxcheps.new.ox.ac.uk

The next issue of Oxford Magazine will appear in second week

How many Divisions has the Vice-Chancellor?

PETER OPPENHEIMER

A recent issue of this *Magazine* (No. 441, Fifth Week, Hilary Term 2022) contained a superbly understated article by Denis Noble, its title – “EJRA – A view from ‘Upstairs’” – giving little hint of the scope or seriousness of its content. The article reflects on the author’s experience of academic life both before and after his official retirement in 2004. Three dimensions are interwoven. One is the meaning of academic freedom. A second is the advancement of understanding, both within and between academic subjects, at all levels from undergraduate to professorial and beyond. The third is the character of Oxford as a collegiate, and hence inherently interdisciplinary, as well as departmental university.

Professor Noble’s reflections complement, and are best read in conjunction with, a much earlier article of his, written several years before his 2004 retirement. “Science, Tutorials and Colleges” appeared in *Oxford Magazine*, No. 187, Fourth Week, Hilary Term 2001, joining a debate initiated by Sir Keith Thomas and Professor Bob Williams on the role of tutorials and of colleges across different disciplines. Together the two articles offer valuable food not only for thought, but perhaps also for a programme of action in Congregation, to those numerous early- and mid-career academics in Oxford whose working life nowadays is spent under the shadow – and the thumb – of those in control in Wellington Square.

Back in 2001 the post-North governance regime was at an embryonic stage. It had not yet revealed its oppressive, corrupting and anti-democratic character. The arrival of executive-style Vice-Chancellors still lay in the future. The headlong expansion of the University’s central bureaucracy had not properly got into its stride. Correspondingly, the focus then of Denis Noble’s attention was not on pressures to conform or on administrative interference with academic objectives and procedures. Rather, it was on the varying role of tutorials in the natural sciences as compared with the humanities; on the assimilation, and implication, of electronic methods of acquiring routine knowledge (“the need for stimulating personal contact through tutorial interaction becomes *more* important, not less.....to complement the increasingly impersonal methods of the twenty-first century”); and on the proven interdisciplinary nature of college society, viewed as a model even by the Princeton Institute of Advanced Studies, where Noble had recently lectured. His concluding paragraph was positively visionary:

“Oxford should examine its own strengths and weaknesses and determine how the unique strengths can be exploited. They are formidable. This is recognised world-wide. I believe we could project Oxford as ideally suited to the twin challenges of the new century: electronic teaching and interdisciplinary research. We

have the personal tutorial tradition to complement the former, and the college (inter-faculty) tradition on which to address the latter. Oxford’s institutions of 2100 will certainly differ substantially from those of today. But so do those of today compared to 1900, 1800 or earlier...”

Two decades on, Noble’s clarion call in 2022 is lower key, more through gritted teeth, symptomized by its reference to “EJRA”. The message is that retirement is nowadays a precious escape route – escape both from administrative harassment and from intellectual bullying to conform to current orthodoxies. Understandably, given his retirement date, Noble identifies the tension too exclusively with the University’s funding needs, and he much overstates its continuity from the decades preceding the North reforms. To-day’s funding pressures on academic staff, unlike those of the 1980s and 1990s, are a constituent of enforced subservience to the post-North central bureaucracy. The latter, in other words, not only squanders huge resources both on its own establishment and on conspicuous building projects unrelated to academic priorities. It also gains additional leverage by then tying large sections of Oxford’s academic staff to what Noble calls “the funding treadmill” of research grants.

Of deeper significance, however, is Noble’s account of his post-retirement switch from cardiovascular physiology to genomics. His book, *The Music of Life: Biology beyond the Genome* – was published (by OUP, happily) in 2006, the thirtieth anniversary of Richard Dawkins’ landmark *The Selfish Gene*. A snappier title, echoing a later work by Dawkins, would have been *The Gene Delusion*. Noble’s book was a pioneer in warning against expecting too much from genomics or gene-centricity both in clinical medicine and in the understanding of evolution. As Noble puts it:

“most association levels....between genes, health and disease states....are low. So much so that many are now concluding that, in effect, all genes are related in some way or other to all disease states. The future for interpreting these results will now depend on linking them to physiological understanding of the extremely complex regulatory processes in living organisms.... [T]he implications for gene-centric theories of evolution are even more fundamental. It is organisms that live or die. What matters in most cases are those regulatory networks, not specific genes. That opens up a can of worms. Nearly all the main principles of Evolutionary Biology need revisiting.”

A paper, “Noble versus Dawkins” by the Dutch philosopher and polymath, Jos de Mul, is available on-line for anyone who wishes to ponder this intellectual clash at greater length. The most revealing aspect, however, is described by Noble himself. For a decade or more, he was

subjected to vilification and demands that he be “cancelled” or ostracized for presuming to question biological orthodoxy. Such attempts to suppress free inquiry do not arise from nowhere. Rather, they are symptomatic of a more general sickness within educational bodies, causing their academic mission to be overridden or undermined by sectional and political interests. To make the point more bluntly: the intellectual laziness that prescribes adherence to neo-Darwinian orthodoxy is all of a piece with plummeting academic standards which hand undergraduates a “good degree” (i.e. nothing less than a 2:1) on the spurious grounds that they have to pay burdensome fees and sometimes come from disadvantaged sections of society.

The same applies to the sergeant-majorish insistence on “one Oxford” – aka unquestioning obedience to central administrative authority – which has been a hallmark of recent Wellington Square policy. Until the baleful North

reforms, Oxford’s unified purpose and identity was entirely taken for granted – as illustrated by Keith Thomas, Bob Williams and Denis Noble when they shared their views on the place of college tutorials in applied science courses in the twenty-first century. With their successors now embedded in separate Divisions of the University, such unity is far more difficult to achieve. At the same time autonomous (and multidisciplinary) colleges have become a focus of resentment from Wellington Square and a standing target for gratuitous interventions – resembling, indeed, Vladimir Putin’s resentment at the independence of former Soviet republics.

In sum, Denis Noble’s experience, and his reflections on the direction of travel of the University in the last two decades, remind us how badly we need to reinstate democracy and collegiality in the University’s affairs, in order to rescue the quality of the academic enterprise.

Oxford Magazine publication arrangements

We are unable to publish the *Oxford Magazine* in print for the foreseeable future, as a result of COVID19-related working restrictions. Arrangements for archival copies will be made at a later date.

We will continue to publish online editions of the *Oxford Magazine* and send emails to our online subscribers. We will also send emails to our print subscribers, where we have an email address for them, so that they continue to receive the *Magazine* in an available format.

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How close to their chests?

G.R.EVANS

Oxford and Cambridge are both busy with financial re-organisation, Oxford with a consultation on a *Finance White Paper*. Cambridge is some way behind. Its Council's most recent *Annual Report* admitted to 'challenges with the University's financial planning and budgeting, with many idiosyncratic ways of operating that have developed over time'. It explained that a review begun in 2018 had 'led to the development of an Enhanced Financial Transparency Project' which reported to the Council in February 2021. This is to be carried out through a Finance Systems Replacement Project, currently in its 'first phase' in hopes of being able to 'approach the software vendor providers in mid-2022'. Only with the 'Financial Transformation Programme's finance system replacement', currently anticipated 'around 2025', will things change. For now 'the operational transactions in Cambridge University Finance System (CUFS), and the Chest allocations based Budget will still operate'.

Cambridge, like Oxford, has long had a 'Chest'. Both kept their books in their historic Chests before they had University Libraries. Oxford's present Chest dates from the seventeenth century and has five keys. It still has notional Curators, with a defined role in the administration of certain trusts, but no longer an actual membership. Cambridge lost its first Chest in the Peasant's Revolt in 1381 but it still has the replacement, with seventeen keys, which is kept in the Registry's room.

The fact that it is no longer possible to look into either Chest to check exactly what it contains presents many problems. The Chests are now metaphors for imperfectly-defined portions of the universities' conduct of their financial affairs. Oxford's Chest is defined in Appendix 8.1 of the *Finance White Paper*. This explains that it is the name given to 'the non-service central costs and income of the University'. It is an accounting device principally for operating income and expenditure in connection with 'items which are recurrent in nature and which are necessary for the University to deliver the academic purpose of the University.' Cambridge's Chest is framed in three clauses in its Statutes. These require all income to be 'credited to the account of the Chest' unless the Statutes and Ordinances provide otherwise, with 'separate accounts' for trusts and other categories of 'funds', with any 'money received' for a 'University purpose' included 'in the appropriate account'. 'University purpose' is not defined in the Statutes.

'Operational' and 'capital' funding

While some 'operational' expenditure goes to the maintenance of capital assets and a form of 'rent' (or 'capital charge') the universities' teaching and research funding cannot possibly fund the major building projects in which both are now engaged. The Oxford *Green Paper* of 2020 which preceded the current *White Paper* notes

that Oxford spent £1.48 billion on Capital Expenditure in the ten years 2008-2018, with a 'growing funding gap between operating surplus and capital expenditure'. This was being 'financed' by 'capital specific' grants and gifts and the 'redemption of invested funds from the Oxford Capital Fund'. Oxford's Financial Statements show that Capital expenditure for 2018-9 was £108m; for 2019-20 it was £136m.

Both universities now have to factor in the costs of servicing their gigantic Bonds and Oxford its arrangement with Legal and General. Oxford announced in December 2017 that it had raised £750m to be used for capital projects through a Bond issue with a maturity of 100 years. In 2019 it entered into a £4 billion joint venture with Legal and General. In January 2020 the £750m Bond was extended by £250m at 2% interest.

Accordingly, Oxford's *Strategic Plan* (2018-2023) gave prominence to 'capital' growth. Commitment 2 promised that 'A prioritised capital programme will be developed' and Commitment 4 on 'raising funds' planned to 'deliver a capital investment programme in the estate and IT of at least £500 million by 2023'. Four years later, the *Finance White Paper* notes that 'the majority of the University's borrowings of over £1bn' are 'already allocated to strategic capital projects and with operating cash declining'. The borrowing costs are 'levied through financing charge on departments occupying the buildings', but 'there is no way of replenishing the capital funds for future capital projects from day to day sources of income'.

Cambridge's own recent capital-intensive projects include its expenditure on the North-West Cambridge Development of homes and research-space for both academic and commercial use. That proved controversial from its initiation. A Topic of Concern Discussion was called in 2002. A *Green Paper* on the North West Cambridge Project in 2010 was confident that 'investment required by the University' could 'be ring-fenced from academic budgets'. In 2012 the University took out a Bond for £350m. By July 2016 the Council was publishing a Notice in response to a critical Discussion on proposed new governance arrangements for the project. It acknowledged that there were shortcomings in financial reporting and control. However, whilst not complacent about the final financial outcome for the project, it believed that 'there remains substantial headroom before the project ceases to produce a positive Net Present Value (NPV)'.

A Report of the Council on external finance for income-generating projects including housing solutions in the non-operational estate was published in April 2018. It predicted that 'the Capital Plan', projected 'the likely capital aspirations of the University over a 20-year horizon to be some £4bn'. Traditional sources of income such as benefactions were likely to be 'insufficient in themselves to support capital developments for the operational estate'. On 25 June 2018 Cambridge took out further Bonds

totalling £600 million, in addition to the Bond issued in 2012. The new Bonds were in two tranches, a £300 million bond with a fixed interest rate of 2.35%, repayable in 60 years' time; and an 'innovative' £300 million bond with an interest rate of 0.25%, repayable in equal annual instalments between 10 and 50 years with payments of principal and interest being linked to any rise in the Consumer Prices Index (CPI), between 0% to 3% per annum.

Concerns have continued to arise. The Council published a *Notice* in November 2020 in response to a Discussion on the creation of a 'Property Board'. It recognised that speakers had queried 'whether lessons have been learned from the management of the North West Cambridge development, as one of the largest assets in the non-operational property portfolio'. A member of the Board of Scrutiny asked 'where the responsibility lies for determining that a particular property asset is non-operational'.

Allocations from the Chests

Oxford's Joint Resource Allocation Method (JRAM), introduced in 2008, was designed (among other things) to divide the funding the University receives for teaching and research among the colleges (now from the Office for Students and Research England within UKRI), roughly covering the need which was once met by the College Fee. It has not been uncontroversial in its operation and in 2014 it was adjusted to incorporate a 'balanced budget' principle to help prevent deficits worsening by making transfers from the Chest.

The *White Paper* acknowledges Oxford's difficulties over Departmental and Division 'reserves', some of which are in surplus, some in deficit. 'At all levels the picture is one of confusion, with each part of the University having different perspectives on the value of their reserves'. The University's own 'perspective' is at risk of distortion because these 'annual surpluses' are likely to have been used 'to fund the expenditure elsewhere in the University' and a significant proportion is in any case 'the direct result of annual transfers from the University Chest'.

In Cambridge transfers from its own Chest are traditionally known as 'allocations'. In October 2021 the *Twenty-Sixth Report* of Cambridge's Board of Scrutiny expressed 'concern' at the 'disclosure in this year's Allocations Report of the existence of £234m of 'Spendable Reserves' in the Schools and Departments and a further £17m of 'Spendable Reserves' in the non-School Institutions'. The Board wanted to know why allocations were being recommended 'year after year given the growing evidence that at least part of these allocations are not obviously being spent by Departments'.

Cambridge's Council publishes an *Annual Report on Allocations from the Chest* for Discussion and subsequent approval by Grace. It regularly turns out that the sums were wrong when the *Reporter* later publishes the Financial Statements. In 2003 Cambridge discussed introducing a Cambridge Resource Allocation Model (RAM). It was emphasised that this would be a 'tool to assist decision-making within the University, not in itself a decision-making mechanism'. It is currently described as:

a Resource Allocation Model, not a Resource Allocation Method, i.e. it is not used to calculate Chest Allocations to Schools and other institutions. At University level it is currently used to inform, rather than drive, decision making.

Only Chest income and expenditure are dealt with under the RAM and it is not concerned with distribution of public funding to the colleges.

The uncertainties of the Covid-19 period meant that only a 'provisional' *Report on Allocations from the Chest* was possible in June 2020. The final *Allocations Report* was published in October, radically rethinking its predictions of a few months earlier. Now it spoke of 'work towards a new approach to determining a Chest budget that is calibrated by reference to actual operating costs', in the hope of mending 'the real and growing gap between budgeted and actual costs'. This prompted an unprecedented two *Reports* from its Board of Scrutiny in one academic year, with the second published as a *Supplementary Report* in January 2021.

In its *Supplementary Report* the Board of Scrutiny noted that plans for reform seemed likely to be:

'significantly hindered by the unsatisfactory systems and processes that seem to pervade the financial operations of the University and by the lack of attention historically given to adequate reporting of useful management information'.

The Board recommended that:

'the Council should produce a specific and quantified proposal to address the well-documented structural deficit in a sustainable way, for wider consultation and open discussion with the Regent House before the publication of the next Allocations Report'.

This proposal is still in the making, no more than a desideratum.

The Discussion of the *Allocations Report* in November 2020 included strong words from Council members, including Madeleine Atkins, former Chief Executive of HEFCE. 'The Allocation mechanism is widely regarded as needing a complete overhaul', she said. The custom of making allocations on the basis of past figures was unsatisfactory in 'its misalignments of incentives and rewards'. The Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Strategy and Planning too called for 'a move away from a budget based on historic allocations to one based on committed expenditure and approved business plans'. At present 'across the University, Schools and institutions are using reserves to supplement Chest allocations and meet ongoing Chest expenditure commitments'.

Problems with reforms of accounting systems

Cambridge's attempt to move to 'commitment accounting', which it understood roughly as keeping an exact record of the relationship between requirements to be met and actual spending, led to the only too well-remembered CAPSA disaster of 2001 and the headline-grabbing inquiry which followed. Persisted with, Oracle Financials subsequently produced the present the Cambridge University Finance System. This, says the Finance Division hopefully:

‘offers real time processing, meaning that you are able to obtain a true picture of a department’s financial position at any given time. The system records departmental budgets, money coming in, going out and any commitments to spend’.

Oxford had had its own encounter with a failed accounting system in 2005. Oxford’s Senior Proctor commented on that in his own Oration in March 2005. ‘Shortly after we took office OSIRIS, the new accounting system, went live; that this has proved a troublesome awakening is commonplace by now.’ Osiris, like CAPSA, had ‘pushed many loyal and dedicated staff’ in the departments ‘almost to distraction’. Oxford is now using Oracle Financials.

The present plans for reform

The proposals in Oxford’s *Finance White Paper* are summed up in the *Gazette* of 24 March. They are intended ‘to improve financial planning processes within the University’, suggesting a settlement for historic reserves replacing them with ‘cash-backed reserves for surpluses going forward’. The plan is ‘to simplify funding flows and introduce a 3-year settlement for central charges’.

Cambridge’s current plan was published in the same week. It is pitched at a higher level of general intention. The *Reporter* of 23 March 2022 contained a *Notice* from the General Board informing the University that it had set up a new Change and Programme Management Board to:

‘address concerns raised by the General Board and the Planning and Resources Committee about the University’s ability effectively to manage several significant change programmes simultaneously’.

It said it was also responding to ‘a recommendation from the Board of Scrutiny to ensure that major change programmes (such as the Recovery Programme and the Finance Transformation Programme) were ‘appropriately resourced, monitored and sponsored on an ongoing basis’. The *Notice* said that the new Board would ‘oversee the progress of projects, highlight interdependencies, assign staff and resources, manage risks’, with terms of reference expressly indicating that this would go into the realms of the Unified Administrative Service. ‘Change programmes’ were defined as ‘large-scale cross-University initiatives with significant resource implications for the University’s overall operations’. Each was to have its own Board. This grouping of long-term troublesome projects with that of reform of financial practice does not promise well where so many other initiatives have failed.

Conclusion

Oxford is making proposals in a *White Paper* stating the difficulties clearly and setting out practical ways of addressing them. It is doing so at a time when financial pressures are likely to mount with the tuition fee still frozen and in a period of national inflation. It is consulting with Congregation.

Cambridge’s latest ‘high level’ and very general plan presents some constitutional difficulties. The General Board cannot simply create a sub-committee of itself and call it a Board. A Board has to be approved by Ordinance

of the Regent House and the Regent House has not been asked to approve the necessary Grace. The new Board is to report to the General Board on a quarterly or annual basis, with the General Board to report ‘onward’ to the Council but with no provision for *Report* to the Regent House. On the contrary, its business is to be ‘confidential’ and there seems to be no provision for its Minutes to be circulated even to the Council.

Both Oxford and Cambridge face formidable difficulties in keeping their finances tidy. These have grown in recent decades as each has extended itself both financially and in terms of activities secondary to its primary work of teaching and research. The interested parties have grown more numerous with some of them external and non-charitable, nor primarily academic at all. And the considerable levels of debt look increasingly threatening in a period of inflation and rising interest rates. The risk of not being able to make the sums add up can hardly be overstated.

¹ *Gazette* (24 March, 2022).

² <https://www.finance.admin.cam.ac.uk/news/modern-financial-reporting-system> <https://www.finance.admin.cam.ac.uk/news/modern-financial-reporting-system> and see <https://www.finance.admin.cam.ac.uk/ftp> <https://www.finance.admin.cam.ac.uk/ftp>

³ *Reporter* (15 December, 2021).

⁴ *Statute* FI (2-4).

⁵ *Green Paper*, p.7.

⁶ Institute of Development and Regenerative Medicine.

⁷ Now extended to 2024.

⁸ https://www.ox.ac.uk/sites/files/oxford/field/field_document/Strategic%20Plan%202018-23.pdf

⁹ *White Paper*, 4.5.7

¹⁰ *Reporter* (7 March 2001).

¹¹ *Reporter* (20 November 2002).

¹² <https://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/reporter/2010-11/weekly/6213/section7.shtml> “Grace 4 of 9 February 2011.

¹³ *Reporter* (13 July, 2016).

¹⁴ *Reporter*, (18 April, 2018),

¹⁵ <https://www.cam.ac.uk/news/university-of-cambridge-raises-ps600-million-in-pioneering-bonds-issue>

¹⁶ *Reporter* (18 November, 2020).

¹⁷ <https://governance.admin.ox.ac.uk/joint-resource-allocation-method>

¹⁸ *White Paper*, p.25.

¹⁹ *Reporter* (20 October, 2021).

²⁰ *Reporter* (19 November, 2003).

²¹ <https://www.afpa.admin.cam.ac.uk/resource-allocation/resource-allocation-model-ram>

²² *Reporter* (24 June, 2020).

²³ *Reporter* (28 October, 2020).

²⁴ Twenty-Fifth Report, *Reporter* (25 November, 2020) and Supplementary Report *Reporter* (27 January 2021).

²⁵ *Reporter* (18 November, 2020).

²⁶ *Reporter* (18 November, 2020).

²⁷ *Reporter* (2 November, 2001).

²⁸ <https://ufs.admin.cam.ac.uk/>.

²⁹ www.finance.admin.cam.ac.uk/files/r122_gen_inttouts.pdf.

³⁰ *Gazette*, Supplement (1), (23 March, 2005).

³¹ It is not clear that the General Board can have the necessary authority. It is ‘responsible for the academic and educational policy of the University’, and must ‘advise the University on questions relating to such policy’. It is ‘accountable to the Council for its management of the University’s academic and educational affairs’, *Statute* A, V, 1.

³² *Statute* A, VI.

REVIEWS

Tracts of fluent heat

Thomas Halliday, *Otherlands: A World in the Making*. (Allen Lane, 2022). £20.00.



Prehistoric animals have become startlingly familiar. Small children cherish plastic models of them, and often memorise their challenging names. They visit museums and see impressive reconstructions of skeletons. The familiarity has its misleading aspect though, since the animals in the playroom are decontextualized, in both time and space. What Halliday does in this ambitious study is to fill in the environments in which extinct plants, birds and animals moved.

The time-scales are vertiginous. If we imagine the history of the earth as a twenty-four hour clock, then the mass extinction 66 million years ago, which put paid to dinosaurs, occurs 21 seconds before midnight and written human history only begins two thousandths of a second before midnight. It's as alarming as concepts of the size of the universe. Think how far the edge of the known universe is away: millions of light years. The star system HD1 has just been spotted; it is 13.5 billion light-years away, and is the remotest celestial object ever seen.

Shelley, the bicentenary of whose death we celebrate in July, grapples with the vast size of the universe in his footnotes to *Queen Mab*, but even he would be astonished at its unimaginable size. David Masson recalls:

'being with Tennyson at Norman Lockyer's house, then near Finchley Road, where he had his own telescope at work in the back garden. There was much interest at that time in the resolution of the nebulae, and we were all looking in turn through Lockyer's telescope, at that particular nebula, then most in favour for the purpose. Tennyson, after gazing intently at it for a long time, turned away from the telescope, and said to the one or two of us that were nearest him, "I don't know what one can say about the county families after that."'

Shelley's 'Ozymandias' records the pathos and warning of lost worlds, and although Shelley is no longer much read (but then, one despairs to think that no one is reading anything these days) the line 'look on my works, you mighty, and despair' is reasonably well-known. One recalls that in 2009 there was a magnificent display of large photographs of the distant universe in the University Parks: 'Earth to the Universe'. Looking at them one thought of Pascal: 'Le silence éternel de ces espaces infinis

m'effraie' (the eternal silence of these infinite spaces terrifies me).

Halliday presents a series of snap-shots of locales in the past, going back further in each chapter, so that by the end we are back at the beginning of the emergence of life. He fills out what Tennyson tells us in *In Memoriam*:

*There rolls the deep where grew the tree.
O earth, what changes hast thou seen!
There where the long street roars, hath been
The stillness of the central sea. (ccxxiii)*

On the way we visit Antarctica, 'covered with a lush closed-canopy forest and filled with the shrieks of birds and rustling undergrowth.' It's substantiated piece of time-travel, but if he actually visited his imagined scenes he'd have to be careful not to tread on a butterfly, since that would provide an alternative future – which is what happens in Ray Bradbury's 'A Sound of Thunder', collected in *The Golden Apples of the Sun* (1953). Although one does recall that butterflies and dinosaurs were not contemporaneous. It's almost as if Halliday is *there*, rather as the geologist William Buckland was in a cartoon by the geologist William Conybeare.



William Buckland in Kirkdale Cave (1822).

Halliday is not keen on the melodrama of lightning-strikes creating life, and is more committed, as are many scientists, to the generative importance of deep-sea thermal vents. If I had been writing the book I'd have begun at the beginning, and moved forward. Each of his snap-shots is in the present tense, as if we are there, but he moves backwards and forwards, so that it's sometimes difficult to know where we are. I'm never very keen on present-tensism, either in actual description or fiction, but it's one way of doing it. Also I'm not that keen on some of his purple prose, for example, 'short willows write wordless calligraphy on the wind with flourished ink-brush catkins.' Darlings one might have been advised to

murder, in Arthur Quiller Couch's phrase. And there's also Dr. Johnson: 'read over your compositions, and wherever you meet with a passage which you think is particularly fine, *strike it out*.'

The book has been widely praised ('The best book on the history of life on Earth I have ever read'), but I am far from sure that everyone will follow all of it, or be able to submit to a stiff cross-examination at the end of all the proliferating names. Gondwana sounds like something from a Brontë sisters fantasy. *Hallucigenia* is a suggestive name. I see the book as raw-material for a television series, and perhaps the Halliday-cene era will displace the Attenboroughcene and Coxcene eras. Let's hope, though, that Halliday won't be too ubiquitous, waving his arms about and going on funded jollies. As Keats says, the hungry generations tread us down. It will provide opportunities for animations, since we really need to *see* what is going on, and, ideally, to *see* the tectonic plates moving, both from aerial views and cross-sections. In colour too, and in relation to present-day topography. Geology has to be imagined as kinetic process. Here is Ruskin in *Deucalion* (1875-1883):

'To form the top of that peak on the north side of the Lake of Thun, you have to imagine forces which have taken – say, the whole of the North Foreland, with Dover Castle on it, and have folded it upside-down on the top of the parade at Margate, – then swept up Whitstable oyster-beds, and put them on the bottom of Dover Cliffs turned topsy-turvy – and then wrung the whole round like a wet towel, till it is as close and hard as it will knit; – such is the beginning of the operations which have produced the lateral masses of the higher Alps.' (1,1)

The BBC's 'Dinosaurs: the Final Day with David Attenborough' has vivid animations. It deals with the Tanis site in North Dakota, which some scientists believe precisely records the asteroid strike of 66 million years ago at Chicxulub in the Gulf of Mexico. Although Steve Brusatte of the University of Edinburgh has expressed some reservations.

The black and white maps and illustrations in *Otherlands* are far from exciting or inviting, and I wonder if they wouldn't have been better on a Mercator projection format. Perhaps even the device of children's pop-up books would be better. There are many televised nature programmes these days which do indeed stress the necessary inter-relation between animal and environmental life, and often watching them one is filled with alarm at the extraordinary pathos and vulnerability of the whole scene:

plants which depend, say, on humming birds to fertilise them, humming birds which depend on the plants. Take one away and the whole lot collapses. Inter-connection is the key, and at one point he has a vivid riff on what is involved in a snack:

'A person drinking a mug of tea with a chocolate biscuit in London can be consuming atoms weathered from minerals in several continents, formed across billions of years; ions absorbed by Indian tea plants grown in a patch of Precambrian Gondwanan gneiss soil, thrown up into steep mountain slopes by the Eocene collision of continents; atoms absorbed from redistributed glacial loam by wheat, since ground into flour as if recapitulating the action of Pleistocene glaciers, and Ivorian cacao, grown in fertilizer made from Paleocene phosphate deposits on endlessly recycled rainforest soils, in turn derived from the ancient basement granites, quartzes and schists of the geological heart of West Africa that even at the time of the Chengjiang biota had been lying beneath the ground for perhaps 3 billion years.'

Life is a perpetual competitive struggle. He writes, 'organisms are not intrinsic do-gooders.' You can say that again. It depends on how one looks at it, but in nature not all things are bright and beautiful, and much of *Otherlands* is the stuff of obscene nightmares. He cites Melville's *Moby Dick*: 'consider, once more, the universal cannibalism of the sea; all whose creatures prey upon each other, carrying on eternal war since the world began,' and I'd throw in Albany's 'Humanity must perforce prey on itself, / Like monsters of the deep' in *King Lear*. I recall the late Philip Jones saying in a Governing Body Meeting, 'It turns out that we have more and more in common with the fruit-fly', and Halliday backs him up here.

There is a sense in which *Otherlands* is timely, since it deals with the impermanence of material reality, and keeps stressing the way in which animal life, including human, is dependent on sustaining environments. We are very concerned with climate change at the moment, and especially the way in which human beings can influence it. But climate change is nothing new, and there are times in the past in which the earth has been both hotter and colder than now.

The large-scale message of this book is that we are doomed. Not that Halliday is telling us anything startlingly new. H.G. Wells's time-machine (1896) takes his time-traveller to an appalling point in the future when the sun is dying and the earth, in Ruskin's phrase in *Deucalion*, is 'in the grasp of an eternal cold':

'A horror of this great darkness came on me. The cold, that smote to my marrow, and the pain I felt in breathing, overcame me. I shivered, and a deadly nausea seized me. Then like a red-hot bow in the sky appeared the edge of the sun. I got

off the machine to recover myself. I felt giddy and incapable of facing the return journey. As I stood sick and confused I saw again the moving thing upon the shoal – there was no mistake now that it was a moving thing – against the red water of the sea. It was a round thing, the size of a football perhaps, or, it may be, bigger, and tentacles trailed down from it; it seemed black against the weltering blood-red water, and it was hopping fitfully about.'

And he also, we are led to believe, visits the remote past:

'Will he ever return? It may be that he swept back into the past, and fell among the blood-drinking, hairy savages of the Age of Unpolished Stone; into the abysses of the Cretaceous Sea; or among the grotesque saurians, the huge reptilian brutes of the Jurassic times. He may even now – if I may use the phrase – be wandering on some plesiosaurus-haunted Oolitic coral reef, or beside the lonely saline seas of the Triassic Age.'

We are wrong to imagine, if we imagine it, that mankind is damaging an environment which before his intervention was universally stable, pristine and Edenic. There have been five major extinctions in the history of the earth, one, already mentioned, 66 million years ago. The end-Permian volcanic eruption in Siberia 252 million years ago sparked a period of global warming and the extinction of many species. The perspectives are not new. Here is Tennyson in *In Memoriam* providing a broad picture:

*Contemplate all this work of Time,
The giant labouring in his youth;
Nor dream of human love and truth,
As dying Nature's earth and lime;*

*But trust that those we call the dead
Are breathers of an ampler day
For ever nobler ends. They say,
The solid earth whereon we tread*

*In tracts of fluent heat began,
And grew to seeming-random forms,
The seeming prey of cyclic storms,
Till at the last arose the man;*

*Who thrive and branch'd from clime to clime,
The herald of a higher race,
And of himself in higher place,
If so he type this work of time*

Within himself, from more to more; (cxviii)

He meditates on personal loss by reflecting on the meaning and impact of the scientific discoveries of the day:

*'So careful of the type?' but no.
From scarped cliff and quarried stone*

*She cries, 'A thousand types are gone:
I care for nothing, all shall go.' (lvi)*

A few lines later he says that although man has believed that love is 'Creation's final law' 'Nature, red in tooth and claw/ With ravine, shriek'd against his creed.' The scientific version of this famous phrase is 'nature red in oral plate and raptorial appendage.'

In fact artistic types in the nineteenth century were often intrigued by the facts of science. The gap between 'the two cultures' was not as marked then. The aesthete Walter Pater points out in *Emerald Uthwart* (1892) that 'when you look close the very stone [of Oxford] is a composite of minute dead bodies.' A character clinging to a Cornish cliff in Hardy's *A Pair of Blue Eyes* (1873) confronts a challenging fossil:

'By one of those familiar conjunctions of things wherewith the inanimate world baits the mind of man when he pauses in moments of suspense, opposite Knight's eyes was an imbedded fossil, standing forth in low relief from the rock. It was a creature with eyes. The eyes, dead and turned to stone, were even now regarding him. It was one of the early crustaceans called Trilobites. Separated by millions of years in their lives, Knight and this underling seemed to have met in their death. It was the single instance within reach of his vision of anything that had ever been alive and had had a body to save, as he himself had now.' (Chapter 22)

I pause to ask whether there are trilobites in Cornish cliffs.

Halliday says that interest in geology and evolution begins in the eighteenth century, but it goes back further than that. In 1886, in the Grotte du Trilobite (Caves of Arcy-sur-Cure, Yonne, France), archaeologists discovered a trilobite fossil that had been drilled as if to be worn as a pendant 15,000 years ago. Trilobites are not found locally, so it must have been traded from elsewhere and highly prized. Until the early 1900s the Ute Native Americans of Utah wore trilobites as amulets, which they called pachavee (little water bug). They believed that they were protection against bullets and diseases such as diphtheria. Closer to our time Girolamo Fracastori (1476-1553) was intrigued by the fossilised creature exposed when fortifications were being dug in Verona. In 1698 the Welsh Historian and Reverend, Edward Lhwyd published in *The Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society* a letter 'Concerning Several Regularly Figured Stones Lately Found by Him', illustrated by an image of a trilobite from near Llandeilo which he described as 'the skeleton of some flat Fish'.

* * *

One context in which Halliday finds himself, and everyone who reminds us of the facts of science find themselves in, concerns

religious faith. There were Divines who thought God had put fossils in the rocks to test one's faith. Ruskin, wanted to hold onto faith, but was perpetually disconcerted. He confided to Henry Acland in 1851 that geology, was destroying his faith:

'You speak of the Flimsiness of your own faith. Mine, which was never strong, is being beaten into mere gold leaf, and flutters in weak rags from the letter of its old forms; but the only letters it can hold by at all are the old Evangelical formulae. If only the Geologists would let me alone, I could do very well, but those dreadful Hammers! I hear the clink of them at the end of every cadence of the Bible verses.'

Quite simply the prodigious extents of time and space make the images of the almost domestic cosiness of the Biblical universe and Dante's universe look absurd. And it was starting to become difficult even for ordinary people to hold on to their faith. Visitors to the Crystal Palace could encounter life-sized replicas of iguanodons made by Benjamin Waterhouse Hawkins (1807-1894).



Benjamin Waterhouse Hawkins. Iguanodons. Crystal Palace

On New Year's Eve 1853 there was the famous Dinosaur Dinner, attended by Richard Owen (1804-1892). Gideon Mantell, the discoverer of the iguanodon, had, alas, died just before. It was reported in *The Illustrated London News*.



The Dinner in the Dinosaur, sketch by Benjamin Waterhouse Hawkins (*The Illustrated London News*, 7 January 1854). Mantell's name is on the right.

The Oxford figure William Buckland (1784-1856) was too ill to attend. He it was who tried to reconcile the facts of new geological studies with the Biblical account of the flood. He ate his way through the animal kingdom, and Ruskin regretted missing a 'delicate toast of mice' in Christ Church (*Praeterita*, 1.11) He coined the word megalosaurus (1824) and also coprolite (1829) (prehistoric faeces).

Life on our planet at the moment is incredibly rich and varied, but reading Halliday one becomes aware that if one takes global history as a whole the riches are even more extended, and often rather alarming. There were penguins as high as a human beings, giant ground sloths, giant dormice and birds with teeth and even more alarming names. Some species baffle even palaeontologists. Halliday mentions the Tully Monster of Mazon Creek, which is as disconcerting to him as a gross American robin is to an ornithologist reared in Britain. Some species, such as *Yamancasia rifeia*, are half animal half plant.

There are a lot of facts in *Otherland*, for instance that fossil vomit survives, and that dandruff existed (no Head and Shoulders though). What is fascinating is that mammoths lasted on Wrangel into comparatively recent times, a mere 4,500 years ago. Inbreeding in the cramped environment put paid to their chances of survival. Incredible to think of a mammoth tusk being found outside the entrance to the Ashmolean Museum not so long ago in 1994. And one should not forget the excitement when a coelacanth, thought to have become extinct at the end-Cretaceous mass extinction, surfaced in 1938.

Halliday is writing from World's End in the Thames valley, below which are remnants of crocodiles, sea turtles and early relatives of horses. He was brought up near Rannoch Moor, celebrated of course in a memorable T.S. Eliot poem:

*Here the crow starves, here the patient stag
Breeds for the rifle. Between the soft moor
And the soft sky, scarcely room
To leap or soar. Substance crumbles, in
the thin air
Moon cold or moon hot.*

I was fortunate to grow up in Dudley, which is geologically fascinating. Our house was below the Rowley quarries ('wind-loved Rowley' Auden calls it in 'Perhaps' – a phrase disgracefully removed from later editions), famous for their hard dolerite. A man in a shed spent all day cutting Rowley Rag into neat cubes, used for stone 'sets' in streets. The edges of our flower-borders were hefty chunks of basalt. And yet only a mile or two away was the Wren's Nest in Dudley, a superb Cambrian Silurian site. When it rained you could scoop up handfuls of fossils from the footpaths. A steeply sloping cliff was filled with fossils – in former times level shelves at the bottom of the sea.



Tilted strata on the Wren's Nest, Dudley.

I never found a trilobite as big as the enormous one in the Dudley museum. They were known as 'Dudley bugs' or 'Dudley locusts' (*Calymene blumenbachii*). A trilobite, appears on the Dudley coat of arms, alongside a salamander – a creature reputedly able to survive in fire, so appropriate for the heavy industry of the Black Country.



Dudley coat of arms with a trilobite (centre) and salamander (bottom).

Halliday mentions that a lecture on fossils in a Dudley quarry attracted 15,000 people in the middle of the nineteenth century. He doesn't say who gave it, but it was Roderick Murchison (1792-1871), who wrote *The Silurian System* as early as 1839. Impressive pillars support the workings of the quarry, which lasted until 1925. One has an impression looking at David Cox's and Richard Manser Rayner's (1843-1908) depictions of lime kilns that a large body of records has gone up in smoke.



Richard Manser Rayner, Lime Kilns. Dudley



Richard Samuel Chattock (1825-1906)
Limestone quarry, Wren's Nest (1872).

Nearby the so-called 'Coseley spider' was named by Ruskin's friend Henry Woodward (1833-1921): *Eophrynus prestvicii*.



The so-called Coseley spider. *Eophrynus prestvicii*.

Further below ground were coal-mines, whose presence was announced by the alarmingly tilted Crooked House.



The Crooked House, near Dudley.

And not so far away was Wenlock Edge, now largely associated with A. E. Housman and Vaughan Williams, but it had a rich Silurian history, made much of in *The Education* of Henry Adams (1918) when he brooded there on his ancestry:

'In Siluria, he understood, Sir Roderick Murchison called the horseshoe a Limulus, which helped nothing. Neither in the Limulus nor in the Terebratula, nor in the Cestracion Philippi, any more than in the Pteraspis, could one conceive an ancestor, but, if one must, the choice mattered little. Cousinship had limits but no one knew enough to fix them. When the vertebrate vanished in Siluria, it disappeared instantly and forever.'

Adams would doubtless take much pleasure in reading *Otherlands*.

I am writing this in Collioure, and out of the window I can see the tilted strata of 'schistes troués', layered like the pages of a book, and the Mediterranean – which was dry until Hercules cut a slot with his sword between Europe and Africa. The immemorial Pyrenees a little way away are described as 'young'.



Collioure. Schistes troués.

There is a literary element in *Otherlands*, beginning with Shelley's 'Ozymandias' (1818), which considers the remote past, and ending with Horace Smith's (1779-1849) sonnet, initially called 'Ozymandias', which was a response to Shelley, but considered the remote future of a city:

*In Egypt's sandy silence, all alone,
Stands a gigantic Leg, which far off
throws
The only shadow that the Desert
knows:
'I am great OZYMANDIAS,' saith the
stone,
'The King of Kings; this mighty City
shows
The wonders of my hand.' – The City's
gone, –
Naught but the Leg remaining to dis-
close
The site of this forgotten Babylon.*

*We wonder, – and some Hunter may
express
Wonder like ours, when thro' the wil-
derness
Where London stood, holding the Wolf
in chace,
He meets some fragment huge, and
stops to guess
What powerful but unrecorded race
Once dwelt in that annihilated place.*

There is a powerful Epilogue to *Otherlands*, in which Halliday considers the current state of affairs, and the colossal damage to the environment perpetrated in our lifetimes, and likely to continue. Seen in the context of geological time the shenanigans of human beings are a mere blip. One wonders whether we shall have the collective, global, political will to slow down the deterioration, although perhaps there is some hope. He cites the Montreal Protocol of 1987, which phased out the production and use of chlorofluocarbons, responsible for the thinning of the ozone layer. I did suggest in my review of Ian McEwan's *Solar* (*Oxford Magazine*, No. 298) that 2084 would see the end of developed life as we know it.

BERNARD RICHARDS

Advent

All life is advent.
Why did a man in a cell write this?
It wasn't, though it would be easy to think so,
The certainty that he was to be taken out
And hung. For, as a boat travels upon death,
He had been sailing this element his whole life.
When the swell rises, the mariner acts, not thinks,
What to do: the hand, the keel, the wind
Sing together, because they have sung together
Many times before, and knowing they will part
Is not part of it.

All life is advent.
Nothing to do with fate:
That's a lazy thing, a market stall pastiche,
A screen where artificial gods pop up
And burst for no reason.
Doubtless you've spotted the paradox:
Chance *is* in there, the swing that could go
Right or left as the evening takes us
But the anonymous traveller
Who sat five minutes beside us
Between King's Cross and Angel
Won't ever return.

So, is it spontaneity?
Of a kind. A dancer rehearsing
Her steps, winter, summer, winter, alone,
With long rain at the window,
Reaching herself for the incomparable alliance,
The meeting of moment and the heart's perception
When honeysuckle opens the night.
Her secret is, the miracle may come, or never.

All life is advent.

The Wild Grave

I lay on your grave in the sunlight.
It was high summer
But the wild trees blew.
The dead – so many beloveds! –
Thronged amongst the meadow flowers.

When I pitch restless
On our marriage bed
Do you turn, shift in dream,
And reach your arm around me
As you did long ago?

Do you hold me in the wind
That scatters last year's fruit
Across the grass?

At Pill Creek

Under the secret, under the dark tree
Past a scrabble of leaves and brambles
And an old hoe stacked against a shed
The path sheers steep down.
Children clamber and chatter
As they carry their toys to the sea,
Enquiring like stars of the stranger
'Did you see our boat at the moorings –
The dark blue and white one, gold stripe –
We're going to paint her.'

Twelve rowers pass.
The sea is far out, on the turn.

The eddy turns under the fingers of saltweed
And the black rocks turn, tilted
All one way by a giant's hand –
They're resting for now, but they'll be off soon.
Watch the ooze underfoot: walking the line needs care.
Our edge leads along the overhang of branches;
They dip, pick the tide, string catches
Of bladderwrack up into the breeze
Like shrouds.

Behind us – what was that? – a click,
A plop, odd, like a spick every so often
Into the mud, insistent, particular.
The water is turning.
Here, look, in their thousands,
Brilliant green acorns, dropped from the cup,
Ready for rooting. Into the rockpools they roll
And amongst the pebbles; and the wide salt arms
Of the sea take them.

A man drives down the causeway
On the opposite bank, unloads tools
Carefully and crosses the plank
That serves as a bridge till the sea returns.
She is fingering the land now,
And the boathouses are alert on their stilts.
Long spools of rope suddenly snake
From the mud as the keels lift.
On his little boat the fisherman
Is looping nets over and over,
Loving his craft amongst the tabernacles
And landing stages; soon we will hear
His outboard motor, see its puff of rancid blue.
Wood doves cluster a last moment
At the sweet source that gushed from the gully:
Remember this, remember where it ran.

A van draws up at the quayside, hastily:
'Pa! Pa! Take me with you!'
The chubby boy runs awkwardly
Across the mudbank, is lifted in,
Hugged and joyful for the rounding
Of the headland in the distance,
Its boundary of blue.
'You can help, watch while I steady her.'
A start. The boat moves out upon the water.
On the seastairs, the stranger smiles and waves.
'Wave! Wave! Do you see him?'
The child laughs, halloos, from the top of his happiness,
Tiptoeing taller and taller to see the figure
Receding to the end of vision,
Arm raised over and over
Each to each under a vast heaven
Till the boat at last rounds the promontory
And the deep comes in.

I Did See Nothing Once

I did see nothing once.
Or something like.
Except that it is not like anything.
But, at extremity, it shows itself briefly,
Like the eyes of a beast glimpsed
In the undergrowth at night.
There, and not there. A glint that kills.

It was dark, and the moon growing.
She was bright as a lighthouse on the soft sea.
Upwards and upwards
The town wound to the spire at its centre
Where time hung,
A vast and jewelled stillness,
A vast and jewelled stillness.
I stood by the window in wonderment
For the lip of eternity fills us with tears.

Then, like some film across my eyes
I thought at first,
That presence dimmed.
The street lights grew watery, the beacon indistinct,
The ebb shrank back into the dark.
Not shadow, nor the night we normally construe;
But lack, lack of light altogether –
The black in caverns when the torch gives out –
The ground of where I stood had vanished,
And now the moon and stars.

I leant out farther. I heard
That I could hear no sound.
Can the sea cease?
She is our heartbeat, mother.
The ear stopped up by the velvet cloak of no acoustic
Is close, very close, to our own cease to be.
It's not that the straining of our senses meets with nothing,
It's that there are no senses left at all.
The tide goes out, one last drain down; then nothing.

* * *

I leant yet farther out, and touched another kind of nothing,
My own body with dimensions gone:
In that annihilation impossible
That I or anything had boundaries,
Or what a boundary was.
This strange dilation took thought with it,
And memory, and all begetting,
No time, direction, edge or circumstance.
Where limit ceases, meaning does also.

* * *

Nothing abhors all these
For they are shape, and shape
Is a break, a rupture, a ripple in the cell,
Something of excess and unaccountable,
Self's stir sparking the prodigal,
The unnecessary, the simple leap into be.
One single tremor is enough to cross this threshold
Into the place where no thing dies.

It seemed a beat passed. Something glowed.
Water over a limpet, a lap upon the sand,
One curlew cry far down the edge of night.
Softly the mist unclosed and rolled away.

There amidst the stars the town shone,
Upward and upward flowering with light.
Its windows were open like candles
And the sea flashed gold as the shoals turned.
I closed the casement.
Nothing did show itself, an instant,
But the truth's not this.
Being abolishes refusal.
How we choose to live creation's here
Is the mystery: whether as nothing, or in darkness,
Or on the lifting of the tide.

HILARY DAVIES

Hilary Davies has published four collections of poetry from Enitharmon: the latest, *Exile and the Kingdom*, was published in November 2016. She is also a translator, essayist and critic; she has received a Gregory Award, has been a Royal Literary Fund Fellow at King's College, London and the British Library, and is a Fellow of the English Association.

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NOTICE

The Editors of the *Oxford Magazine* regret that they cannot publish any material submitted to them anonymously. If the author requests publication on the basis that the author's name and university address be withheld from the readership, the Editors will consider the reasons given and in their discretion may publish on that basis; otherwise the material will be returned to the author.

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